Investigating school leadership styles for promoting effective instructional practices in South African schools

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Abstract

This research is of significant importance as it investigates the leadership styles, including transformational, transactional, and distributed leadership, employed in South African schools intended to improve teaching and learning. The qualitative methodology included in-depth interviews with 12 participants purposefully sampled from four schools: principals, school management team members, department heads, and teachers. Data analysis focused on identifying patterns while maintaining data quality through thematic analysis. The study found that school leaders understood various leadership styles used to improve teaching and learning. However, effective adoption of appropriate leadership styles within their context required a deeper understanding. The research also revealed that specific school leadership practices directly influenced student and teacher commitment, referring to their dedication and engagement in the teaching and learning process. Consequently, leaders should explore leadership styles that foster commitment among educators and students. To enhance instructional quality, schools should use different leadership styles depending on the context of the school. Additionally, to improve the efficacy of school leadership, leaders should be empowered through workshops and training programs.

Keywords: Instruction, Leadership, Practices, School, Students And Teachers

Introduction

Over the past decade, South African schools, particularly those in rural and township areas, have consistently struggled with poor performance in the Annual National examinations. This decline in teaching and learning outcomes has been attributed to ineffective school leadership (Munna, 2021). While previous research has explored school leadership styles, there remains to be a greater understanding of the specific approaches that effectively foster instructional practices in South African schools (Atasoy, 2020; Fasiku, 2021). This study is born out of the urgent need to fill this gap and investigate the relationship between leadership styles and improved teaching and learning outcomes in the South African context. A recent survey by Sipho and Mzzokwana (2024) in the Eastern Cape of South Africa revealed minimal improvement in student performance over several years,

ranging from 46.7% in 2016 to 67.7% in 2021. Given the underperformance of South African schools, this study is a necessary step to identify effective leadership styles and approaches that can enhance instructional practices and improve student outcomes (Makgato & Mudzanani, 2019).

Leadership styles are the various strategies and approaches that leaders employ to influence and guide their followers (Beri & Shu'aibu, 2018). In educational settings, leadership styles have been shown to significantly impact the teaching and learning environment (Francisco, 2019). Transformational leadership, characterised by its ability to inspire and motivate followers, has been demonstrated to have a positive effect on student commitment and teacher satisfaction (Atasoy, 2020; Francisco, 2019). In contrast, transactional leadership, which relies on rewards and punishments to achieve organisational goals, is generally less effective than transformational leadership, especially when urgency is not a primary concern (Gougas & Malinova, 2021). Laissez-faire leadership, where leaders have limited involvement and allow followers to act independently, is often seen as less effective in enhancing teaching and learning outcomes (Wadji, 2017). Corrigan and Merry (2022) argue that school leaders must carefully consider their specific context, needs, and leadership styles to inform their choice of leadership approach. Leaders can effectively improve educational outcomes by applying their leadership styles to different school contexts.

Implementing a particular leadership style can be challenging for several reasons. School leaders must be self-aware and capable of accurately assessing their strengths and weaknesses to execute their responsibilities effectively. Adaptability and flexibility are essential for adjusting leadership styles to different scenarios. External factors such as school culture, resource availability, and community expectations can significantly impact leadership style and effectiveness (Karadag, 2019). Despite extensive research on school leadership styles, unexplored areas still need to be explored, such as how leadership styles can directly influence teaching and learning outcomes. In-depth research is required in order to examine the long-term impact of different leadership styles on school leadership, student well-being, and the mitigation of systemic challenges affecting teaching and learning (Ziduli et al., 2018). A broader study is necessary to understand which leadership styles can be effectively applied in various teaching and learning settings to enhance student achievement.

Recent literature highlights the crucial role of school leadership in enhancing teaching and learning quality and educational outcomes (Kalkan et al., 2020). While extensive research has been conducted on the general influence of school leadership, there remains to be a greater understanding of the specific leadership styles that can effectively promote instructional practices. This study focuses on South African schools to provide insights into a particular context critical for addressing local teaching and learning challenges (Francisco, 2019). Despite broader knowledge of leadership in education, there needs to be more understanding of certain leadership styles that can optimise instructional activities. This study aims to bridge this gap by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of adopting different leadership styles to improve teaching and learning in South African schools. The study can offer valuable insights for educators and policymakers by focusing on this specific context.

Research questions

The research question below was explored to understand the different leadership styles used to enhance teaching and learning in South African schools.

How do leadership styles influence teaching and learning practices in South African schools?

South African historical context for school leadership

Since the end of apartheid in 1994, South African education has undergone significant transformation. Under apartheid, school leaders played a detrimental role in enforcing racial segregation among students and teachers (Buthelezi, 2016). This systemic inequality eroded the authority and efficacy of school principals. An analysis of Curriculum 2005, the National Curriculum Statement, and Outcomes-Based Education reveals their impact on the roles and skills of post-apartheid South African school leaders (Chisholm, 2005). These policies and accompanying training workshops have been implemented to strengthen the skills and efficacy of school leaders. Despite these

efforts, the effectiveness of school leadership in providing quality education could be more consistent. The South African curriculum and policies have been criticised for failing to generate a healthy school climate conducive to effective teaching and learning (Botha, 2016). The apartheid government's manipulation of the school system and leaders had far-reaching consequences for the quality of education (Ertem, 2021). This planned manipulation led to the disengagement of some school leaders and teachers, resulting in decreased educational outcomes. For example, in 2017, South African high schools ranked 10th in reading and 8th in arithmetic compared to low-income countries like Tanzania, Kenya, and Swaziland (du Plessis, 2020). The legacy of apartheid continues to hinder the education system, emphasising the urgency of ongoing post-apartheid reforms.

Since the end of apartheid, the South African government has prioritised education reform. A key strategy has been to recruit qualified school principals and teachers to fill vacancies (Makgato & Mudzanani, 2019). However, many appointed leaders needed to gain the skills and competencies to lead schools effectively (Khumalo, 2019). The inability of many school leaders to establish a favourable school environment and manage schools effectively highlights the poor quality of leadership in the South African education system. This leadership crisis has hindered the creation and maintenance of a conducive learning environment, particularly in rural and township schools (Bhengu & Myende, 2016). Post-apartheid school policies have primarily transformed school leaders into policy implementers rather than instructional leaders focused on curriculum, quality assurance, and school improvement (Pietersen, Langeveldt, & Van Wyk, 2023). Strong leadership that can adapt to curricular changes is essential for practical teaching and learning in schools (Chisholm, 2005). In response to these challenges, the South African government has implemented continuous policy formulation and implementation to address the systemic issues within the country's education system.

Theoretical framework: Transformational leadership theory

The theoretical framework used for this study is transformational leadership theory, which Burns proposed in 1976 (Burns, 1978).

The theoretical framework for this research is rooted in James MacGregor Burns' Transformational Leadership Theory (1978). Transformational leaders foster collaboration, motivate followers, and inspire deep commitment to the organisation's vision (Burns, 1978; Okoli & Adani, 2021; Alqatawenh, 2018). Strong leaders can reduce subordinates' anxieties and provide the needed support in challenging times (Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016; Alkhawlani et al., 2019).

In the school context, transformational leadership inspires teachers and students, which can lead to improved teaching and learning outcomes (Bayer, 2021). In addition, transformational leaders support schools by encouraging teachers to embrace technology and professional growth, promoting collaboration, which ensures access to the necessary resources (Koehler & Mishra, 2005). This creates a more engaging, supportive, and effective learning environment.

Figure 1.1: A Transformational Model
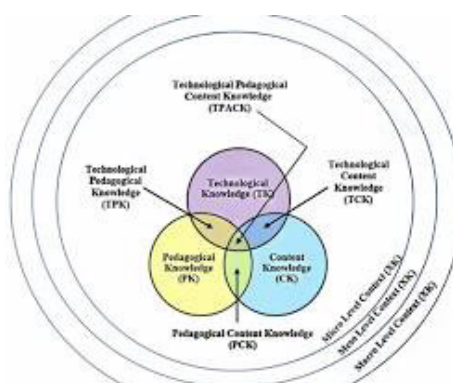
Source: Koehler and Mishra (2005)

According to this model, a school's success relies on several key factors: strong leadership, professional development, effective curriculum and instruction, authentic assessment, technology integration, a positive school climate, and robust partnerships. These components are interconnected and crucial for creating an environment that supports teaching and learning. By prioritising these elements, schools can enhance the quality of education and improve learning outcomes for all students.

Literature Review

To explore the research question, relevant literature related to this study was reviewed to understand the nuances of leadership styles used to enhance teaching and learning in South African schools. The decisions made by principals regarding school leadership are widely acknowledged as an important determinant of the quality of instruction, education, and learning within a school (Francisco, 2019). However, it is crucial to recognise that school principals' leadership styles are shaped by various factors, including the school environment and specific challenges that confront the school. A comprehensive literature review highlights enhanced classroom teaching and learning were undertaken. These are subsequently discussed below.

Instructional leadership

An instructional leadership style is a leadership approach that emphasises the importance of teaching and learning for the school's improvement. Shava and Heystek (2021) assert that this school leadership approach involves creating a positive school climate that supports teachers and students in achieving learning outcomes and cultivating a culture of teaching and learning. A study conducted in South Africa by Hadley et al. (2008) demonstrated the significant impact of instructional leadership on learner performance, even in resource-constrained primary schools. The study revealed the ability of instructional leaders to strive for reforms and improvements in learning outcomes in schools. This highlights the need for a holistic approach to improve the school environment. Instructional leadership is essential for creating a positive school climate, supporting teachers, and prioritising learning (Hadley et al., 2008). This ultimately leads to improved teaching and learning and student achievement.

Nurdianti and Nurdin (2019) emphasise that the instructional leadership style is responsible for enhancing the skills of teachers and creating a supportive environment for teaching and learning. This is achieved through professional development programs and effective teaching strategies (Sugihartini et al., 2019). Instructional leaders enhance student learning outcomes by creating a conducive learning climate, which includes effective classroom management and the use of assessment and feedback (Williams, 2024). Moreover, the ability of instructional leaders to organise different stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and the community, contributes to the positive achievement of educational outcomes in general (Feyisa & Edosa, 2022). In line with this understanding, Hompashe (2018) suggests that instructional leadership is essential for school development, as it actively contributes to improving the school environment and performance. However, Awan, Shahzadi, and Parveen (2023) caution that more than overreliance on instructional leadership is needed to mitigate the challenges of learning outcomes. Such leaders should use a blend of leadership styles to address these challenges effectively.

Participative school leadership

Participatory leadership, as defined by Buthelezi (2016), is a leadership style that involves shared decision-making with all stakeholders. In the school context, this approach is characterised by the leader's ability to effectively coordinate the actions of all teachers and staff (Komariah et al., 2023). Coordinating school activities, a key element of participatory leadership manifests in various forms, such as delegating responsibilities, empowering teachers, and promoting collaboration and communication with all stakeholders. According to Zaila and Bin Bakr (2021), the participatory leadership style is evident in how school principals adopt this approach in various aspects of school administration and management. Participatory leadership creates a supportive environment that encourages effective instruction, commitment, and a sense of belonging among teachers, students, and

other stakeholders. Zaila and Bin Bakr (2021) emphasise that school leaders use the participatory leadership style because it makes school management effective.

As Bell et al. (2018) described, participatory leadership involves a collaborative decision-making process that includes teachers and principals in instructional activities. Meintjes (2018) supports this approach by highlighting how it affects teachers in decisions, leading to increased motivation, improved student success, and commitment to the school's goals. The participatory leadership style acknowledges the invaluable contribution of teachers to the quality of teaching and learning in schools (Warren, 2021). By focusing on teachers' expertise and participation in decision-making, participatory leadership can promote social cohesion and team building within the school setting (Shava & Heystek, 2021). However, the successful implementation of participatory leadership requires clear and open communication, effective conflict resolution, and clear direction to avoid challenges and delays in decision-making. The participatory leadership approach seems significant in empowering teachers to influence the quality of teaching and learning.

Directive school leadership

Bell et al. (2018) defined the directive leadership style as providing subordinates with a structured framework to guide their actions and decision-making. While it involves decision-making, this is aligned with the goal of participative leadership. The directive leadership style demands a clear and explicit interaction between followers and the directive leader regarding expectations, strategies, and the quality of decision-making (Solomon & Steyn, 2017). The directive leadership style is typically characterised by a centralised decision-making approach, with the leader primarily involved in goal-setting and problem-solving (Bwalya, 2023). The directive leadership style emphasises task orientation and attaining specific objectives (Chua & Osman, 2021). According to Chua and Osman (2021), directive leadership is noted to be effective in circumstances that require decision-making, clear direction, and a strong emphasis on the completion of tasks. While directive leadership can be beneficial in certain contexts, it is important to blend it with another leadership style to achieve comprehensive improvements in teaching and learning.

To implement a directive leadership approach, leaders must establish performance standards, rules, and regulations for followers to function effectively. The effectiveness of the directive leadership style depends on the leader's ability to maximise authority and support subordinates in delegated tasks (Solomon & Steyn, 2017). When implemented correctly, a directive leadership style can ensure that organisational objectives are achieved efficiently and timeously. Wang, Hou, and Li (2022) posit that directive leaders provide clear directives to followers by outlining expectations, tasks, and deadlines. By establishing performance standards and communicating expectations effectively, school leaders can implement this leadership approach to enhance instructional activities in the school (Nkengbeza & Shava, 2016). However, a common shortcoming of the directive leadership style is its potential to limit creativity and autonomy, which can harm followers' morale and creativity. While this type of leadership may be effective for achieving short-term goals, it may only be suitable for some settings that demand flexibility and adaptability.

Transactional leadership in education

Nazim and Mahmood (2016) defined transactional leadership as an exchange between leaders and followers, similar to a contractual relationship where rewards are given for employee loyalty and dedication. The primary goal of transactional leadership is to motivate followers through rewards, essentially encouraging them to work in exchange for favourable incentives. Transactional leaders achieve this by clearly defining objectives and explaining how their followers' actions contribute to realising those goals (Young, 2020). Thus, there is an agreement between the leader and the employee, where the leader rewards employees who are loyal and dedicated to the organisation's vision. Klein (2023) argues that the primary objective of transactional leadership is to inspire followers through rewards and motivate them to work for incentives, especially in a school setting where periodic tasks and adherence to set processes are critical for achieving educational outcomes (Klein, 2023). A transactional leadership style, which involves establishing clear guidelines, rewards and incentives, and systematic procedures, can enhance the achievement of educational goals.

Jekelle (2021) observes that school administrators often use transactional leadership, emphasising organisation, efficiency, and follower oversight. This leadership style is common in school settings. However, Malechwanzi (2019) suggests that transactional school leaders should work with their followers to establish predefined objectives before committing to these goals. While this approach provides clarity and structure, it may limit a leader's ability to evaluate outcomes and make necessary adjustments. Malechwanzi also notes that transactional leadership appears to over-rely on regulation and incentives at the expense of creativity and loyalty. Susilo (2018) proposes that leaders should incorporate elements of transformational leadership to inspire and motivate employees toward a common goal. This complementary approach of integrating transformational leadership features with transactional leadership is essential for influencing and equipping teachers to achieve optimal learning outcomes.

Method

The study investigated leadership styles used in South African schools to promote teaching and learning. Given its qualitative nature, the study employed a qualitative research approach and a case study design to explore the different school leadership styles that can improve teaching and learning. The qualitative approach allowed for in-depth examination of complex issues within their contexts (Black, 2006). A case study design enabled the researcher to delve into various perspectives on a particular situation, uncovering complexities often missed in other research approaches (Dehalwar & Sharma, 2024).

The study population included school leaders and teachers with significant leadership experiences. A purposive sampling method was used to select 8 participants, including four principals (PR1-4) and four heads of department (HOD1-4). For anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing in-depth qualitative discussions using an open-question format. This approach enabled participants to provide comprehensive insights into the phenomenon being studied (Mestry, 2017). Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, identifying emerging themes and patterns. Thematic analysis helps researchers identify and interpret potential patterns, themes, and meanings within data (Perera, 2023).

The research obtained ethical clearance and adhered to all ethical procedures before data collection commenced. Necessary protocols were established to ensure a thorough understanding of school leadership styles from participants. Interview sessions were scheduled at the participant's convenience, lasting between 45 and 60 minutes to comprehensively explore the research topic (Naeem et al., 2023). The study's validity was ensured through rigorous and systematic data analysis to identify themes and patterns in the transcriptions (Johnson et al., 2020).

Results and Discussion

The research question for this study was: "How do different leadership styles influence teaching and learning practices in South African schools?" This question guided the investigation throughout the study. The findings revealed a range of leadership styles and challenges that affect teaching and learning within schools. Participants' responses indicated varying levels of understanding regarding school leadership styles and their impact on instructional activities. The analysis of these responses generated several themes, which are summarised in

Table 1.1: Key Findings on Leadership Styles and Teaching and Learning in South African Schools.

Theme	Key Finding
Leadership Styles	A variety of leadership styles are used in South African schools, but there is no one-size-fits-all approach.
Leadership Flexibility	Effective leadership requires flexibility and adaptability to address the unique challenges and circumstances of each school.

Transformational Leadership	The study explored leadership styles within the framework of transformational leadership, highlighting the importance of inspiring and empowering others.
Positive School Environment	Effective leadership is crucial for creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment.
Student Achievement	Strong leadership can positively influence student motivation, engagement, and academic achievement.
Collaborative Leadership	Involving teachers, students, and other stakeholders in decision-making is essential for successful leadership.
Professional Development	School leaders and teachers need ongoing professional development to stay up-to-date with current trends and best practices.

Source: Author

These themes presented above are interpreted, analysed, evaluated, and discussed in line with the findings of the literature, the study's research question, and the theoretical framework used to respond to the research aim and question of the survey below.

Presentation of findings

Theme 1: Leadership Styles

The findings suggest that various leadership styles are used in schools to enhance teaching and learning. Responses indicated that leaders preferred different leadership styles and approaches to solving problems depending on the school context. Participant PR indicated that school leaders adopt different styles of leadership based on the circumstances of the school by saying that;

PR1: "We use a mix of democratic, autocratic and other leadership styles to address school challenges. The choice of leadership style used mostly depends on the school context. For instance".

Similarly, HOD2 explained that whichever leadership style is selected should be adjustable to the school's needs. Participant HOD2 pointed out;

HOD2: "Whichever leadership style we use should adapt to our unique situation. Sometimes using a more hands-off approach is needed while other times using a directive leadership style is required"

Participant PR2 explained that using a combination of leadership styles is the most effective approach instead of sticking to only one. Participants PR2 indicated that;

PR2: "In our school, we prefer using a combination of leadership styles, which is more effective than using only one. For instance, we may use both transformational and transactional leadership styles to inspire a team and ensure accountability, respectively."

Theme 2: Leadership Impact on Teaching and Learning

This theme highlights the influence of leadership styles on teaching and learning. It shows how effective leaders influence teaching and learning by creating a positive school environment that impacts the need for learners to strive to excel in their studies. Participant PR2 asserted that effective leadership can be essential in creating an improved school environment. Participant PR2 mentioned that;

PR2; "Effective school leadership is crucial for creating a conducive school environment. When school principals are supportive and motivating teachers and students, they become motivated to work hard".

Participant HOD1emohasise that having a strong school leader can influence student achievement. The participant said

HOD1: *"I think that having a strong school leader can influence student engagement and achievement. Leaders can do this by setting high expectations and providing the necessary support to teachers and students. This can help leaders unearth students' potential."*

In support, participant HOD3 also believe that the role of school leaders is vital in ensuring a school culture. Participant 3 responded that;

HOD3: *"School leadership, for me, plays a vital role in developing a vibrant school culture. Leaders achieve this by being positive and collaborative. Creating such an environment is supportive and inclusive".*

Theme 3: Leadership Development

This theme revealed how leadership development is essential to shaping a positive and supportive teaching and learning environment in the school. Participants' responses indicated that effective leadership influence instructional activities in the school by fostering a positive school teaching and learning culture. Participant PR3 highlighted how ongoing professional development is necessary for school leaders by saying that;

PR3: *"There is a need for continuous professional development for leaders and teachers, which is necessary to enhance teaching and learning. Professional development ensures that both leaders and teachers are abreast with current trends and best practices in education".*

Participant HOD4 shared a similar sentiment with PR3 by saying that;

HOD4: *"Schools should prioritise leadership development. Investing in the school's leaders can enhance the general performance of the school".*

Participant HOD, in contrast, explains the need for the training of leaders and

HOD3: *"Providing mentoring programs for potential leaders. Providing opportunities for new leaders fosters growth and development, which ensures sustainable leadership and improvement in the school's management".*

Theme 4: Leadership and School Context

This theme explores the link between leadership styles and their effect on the instructional environment of schools. Participants reflected on how the different leadership approaches affect the teaching and learning practices in the school. Participant PR4 responded that the choice of leadership style should be based on the needs of the schools. PR4 said;

PR4: *"The leadership style that we adopt should be by the school's specific needs. For instance, rural and urban schools may have different needs and prefer different leadership to suit their context".*

Similarly, HOD3 opined that certain contextual factors should be considered when selecting a school leadership approach. HOD3 said;

HOD3: *"I think that the leadership style that we use should be determined by contextual factors like the school's locations, staff profile and the availability of resources. These considerations can help leaders to function effectively".*

Participant PR4 held a contrasting view by indicating that general principles should guide the selection of leadership styles. PR4 expressed that:

PR4: *"Though there may be particular principles of strong leadership, different strategies used may vary depending on the unique context of the schools".*

Theme 5: Leadership and Collaboration

This theme highlights the connection between leadership styles and the collaboration of different stakeholders in schools. It focused on how various leadership styles can enhance or hinder collaboration between teachers, students, leaders and stakeholders of the school. Participant PR1 underlined the role of strong leaders

in forging cooperation in the school. PR1 mentioned that;

> PR1: *"Usually, I think effective leaders are collaborative and encourage strong relationships among their followers. Ensuring teamwork and collaboration can help the school to achieve enhanced teaching and learning ".*

Participant HOD2 emphasised the need for schools to see collaboration as a success factor for school leadership by saying:

> HOD2: *"If leaders want to succeed in implementing effective teaching and learning in schools, then they should see collaboration as key to successful leadership. Involving all stakeholders in decision-making fosters a democratic and inclusive teaching and learning environment".*

Contrastingly, Participant PR3 preferred that schools forge partnerships with parents and the community to get the needed support. Participant PR3 said;

> PR3: *I think our leaders need to build relationships with parents and the community to ensure strong leadership. Building partnerships with parents and the school community can solicit support for enhanced teaching and learning".*

Participants emphasised the importance of adapting leadership styles to the specific context of each school. Effective leadership, tailored to the unique needs of the school environment, is crucial for fostering a supportive and inclusive learning culture. Strong leadership can address challenges that impact teaching and learning by influencing student motivation, engagement, and academic success. By identifying and addressing contextual challenges, schools can create a sense of belonging and community.

Participants agreed that improving the school environment requires prioritising leadership development, considering the school's unique context, and fostering partnerships among stakeholders. Effective leadership necessitates continuous professional development to stay updated with current educational trends and best practices. Leaders should be capable of employing various leadership styles that fit their school's needs, as each school faces its distinct challenges. Building strong relationships with all stakeholders and involving them in decision-making fosters a democratic and inclusive environment. By focusing on these areas, schools can ensure effective leadership to enhance teaching and learning.

Literature findings on leadership styles used in schools support the participants' insights and reveal a variety of approaches aimed at enhancing teaching and learning. These styles can be broadly categorised into participatory leadership, which emphasises collaboration and shared decision-making, and directive leadership, which focuses on clear instructions and centralised control. The literature suggests that only one leadership style is universally effective; leaders must be flexible and adaptable to address the unique challenges of their school context (Francisco, 2019; Nurdiantu & Nurdin, 2019; Mestry, 2017). This aligns with the concept of transformational leadership, which emphasises the leader's role in creating a supportive environment that fosters collaboration and shared instructional leadership practices (Bayer, 2021; Ali et al., 2020; Pont, 2020; Alkhawlani et al., 2019; Hompashe, 2018).

Transformational leadership styles encourage leaders to inspire and motivate teachers, empowering them to enhance teaching and learning actively. This approach is particularly relevant in South Africa, where school principals face significant challenges in promoting effective teaching and learning (Bhengu & Myende, 2016). These challenges include limited resources, diverse student needs, and a complex educational landscape. By adopting a transformational leadership approach, school leaders can create a more supportive and collaborative environment, fostering a shared responsibility for improving teaching and learning. This approach can help address the challenges faced by school principals and create a more conducive learning environment for all students.

Table 1.2: Interventions to Improve Leadership and Teaching and Learning in South African Schools

Intervention	Focus	Expected Outcome
Leadership Development and Training	Developing leadership skills and competencies	Improved leadership effectiveness, increased capacity for innovation, and enhanced decision-making
School Culture and Climate	Creating a positive and supportive school environment	Increased student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement, improved teacher morale, and reduced disciplinary issues
Policy and Governance	Aligning policies and governance structures with current best practices	Improved accountability, transparency, and efficiency in school operations
Research and Evidence-Based Practices	Promoting the use of research-based practices in schools	Enhanced teaching and learning outcomes, improved decision-making, and increased innovation
Community Engagement	Building partnerships and involving the community in school activities	Increased support for schools, improved communication and collaboration, and enhanced community-school relationships

Source: Author

By implementing these measures, as clearly illustrated in the table above, schools in South Africa can enhance the adoption of leadership practices to improve teaching learning and student achievement. While these interventions can help enhance instructional activities in schools, schools must recognise that specific interventions may vary depending on each school's context and needs.

Conclusion

The study reveals the diverse leadership styles employed by South African schools to enhance teaching and learning. While school leaders prioritise creating a conducive learning environment and improving instructional practices, the effectiveness of leadership approaches varies depending on the school's specific context. A key factor influencing instructional activities is how the school leadership style aligns with the unique characteristics of the school.

The study identifies several commonly used leadership styles, including democratic, autocratic, laissez-faire, transformational, instructional, and ubuntu. However, the study underscores that the effectiveness of a leadership style is subjective and depends on its implementation. To maximise teaching and learning outcomes, school principals must be competent, qualified, adequately supported, and deeply understand their roles and responsibilities. Moreover, their ability to adopt the appropriate leadership style based on the school's context is crucial for enhancing teaching and learning and ensuring continuous improvement.

Effective school leadership depends on factors such as the leader's ability to adapt their leadership style to different situations, focus on improving quality teaching and learning, and inspire teachers and students. The study emphasises the importance of leaders understanding their unique context to select the most suitable leadership style or combination to meet their needs and goals.

Recommendation

To enhance teaching and learning, education authorities should support the professional development of school leaders through workshops, seminars, and training programs. School leaders should adopt effective leadership styles to foster a positive learning environment. Understanding their roles and responsibilities, as well as different leadership styles, is crucial for achieving this goal. This study recommends that educators, students, parents, and other school stakeholders actively engage in decision-making and collaboration to promote a cohesive teaching and learning environment. Such collaboration can help bridge communication gaps and strengthen the school community.

Limitation

Studies should use a larger, more diverse sample to improve generalizability and reduce sampling bias. Additionally, researchers should investigate the interaction between school leaders and contextual factors such as school culture, resources, and community dynamics to understand their impact on teaching and learning better.

Suggestion for Further Studies

Due to the current study's limitations, future studies need to focus on generalizability. They should consider using a broader and more diverse sample from different backgrounds to reduce sampling bias and improve the study's external validity. Additionally, researchers should explore how leaders interact with contextual factors in the school environment, which could enhance our understanding.

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